

By STUART EARP: Wycombe Wanderers 2, Southall 0

WHILE frost-bound F.A. Cup opponents Reading were out of action on Saturday, Wycombe Wanderers added three more Rothmans Isthmian League points to their tally with a 2-0 win over Southall. But although Wanderers got in some match practice, there was little satisfaction from the victory which was played in extremely difficult conditions.

More than half of the league fixtures were affected by the severe frosts on Friday night and it was touch and go whether the match at Loakes Park would take place until referee Gordon gave the O.K. shortly before kick off.

As it was the pitch was still rock hard and the frost was still crisp on the top flank where the sun had not reached due to the shadow of the stand. This made it very much a game of chance with players struggling to keep their balance on the treacherous surface.

Considering the conditions, I suppose we should salute the players for the standard of football achieved and Wanderers had the satisfaction of scoring two excellent goals through Ian Pearson and Dylan Evans. Southall had their chance too, none more so than centre forward Knowles who was unlucky with a handful of shots that just failed to find the target for various reasons.

One main reason was the performance of Peter Spittle, the Blues No. 2 goalkeeper. Peter came in at the last moment for the injured John Maskell and produced an excellent performance. And when his judgement erred just once, a goal post came to his rescue. Apart from that, however, he showed a clean pair of hands and his reactions were as sharp as a razor.

MINUTE'S SILENCE

Another welcome success story on the day was that of Dylan Evans, a player who struggles to reach a degree of consistency. On Saturday Dylan was a revelation, made the first goal, scored the second and played with greater confidence that augurs well for next week's cup tie. Howard Kennedy also worked well in midfield.

Wanderers had Howard

Kettleborough back upfront after a fortnight's absence through injury which meant that Peter Cruse switched back to midfield. Former Wycombe player Derek Harris, was in opposition at centre forward.

A minute's silence was observed in memory of that much liked official Vince McCowan who was tragically killed in a car crash coming away from a football match last month. Vince, a stocky character who delighted the crowd with his raucous shouts of 'Blue ball!', will be sadly missed. He was to have taken charge of Saturday's match.

Southall took time to settle but showed their danger in the 13th minute. Kennedy's free kick struck the defensive wall and Ian Pearson gave the ball away to Clarke. He ran half the length of the field but Spittle came out to meet him and brilliantly deflected the ball away for a corner.

Early on in the game Knowles slipped badly in front of the stand and required some attention but the referee, who must have wondered at that stage whether his decision was right, allowed the game to continue. Thankfully there were no repetitions of Knowles' bad fall.

A dangerous cross from Harris after 33 minutes almost set up a chance for Knowles but he mistimed his shot and three minutes later Wycombe broke away to score.

SUPER SAVE

Wanderers were on the defensive when the ball was cleared up field to Evans. He turned, looked up and spotted Pearson on half way. Dylan clipped the ball over the defence and Pearson sped clear with only the goalkeeper to beat. Lynton did the right thing in coming out but Pearson gave him no chance by lobbing over the 'keeper's head from outside the box. The ball bounced a couple of times before finding the back of the net.

This was Ian's 18th goal of the season and one that showed his real confidence in these situations. It also gave Wanderers a useful half time lead which must have boosted their confidence for the new half.

After the break, however, it was Southall who looked the better side and with a shade more luck they might well have

gone away with a point to show for their efforts. On Saturday, however, lady luck chose to shine on Wycombe.

Only a super save from Spittle kept Wycombe's lead intact after 55 minutes when Harris nodded the ball on to Knowles. He turned and shrugged off Phillips' challenge before firing in a shot which Spittle grabbed at full stretch.

On several occasions the Blues back four might have chosen to clear the ball hard upfield rather than play themselves out of trouble. A long ball on this surface seemed to cause quite a few problems.

Tony Price came on for Kettleborough after 58 minutes, the big striker trying hard but never coming to terms with the conditions.

Goalkeeper Spittle's one error in the game came in the 63rd minute. Harry Manoe ran infield and tried his luck with a ground shot from some 30 yards. It wasn't particularly powerful but it zipped over the surface. Spittle slipped on his line and seemed to think the ball was going wide but the ball struck the upright and bounced along the line before being cleared.

Ten minutes later Wanderers produced a lovely move for the second goal. Birdseye floated over a long cross from the right which Holifield nodded back across goal. Evans was there at the far post and hooked home a volley past Lynton. None of the Southall players touched the ball in the move which was a tribute to the skills of those involved.

Spittle tipped Knowles' shot away for a corner after 78 minutes and then repeated the process by saving with his legs from the same unfortunate forward soon afterwards.

Knowles must have felt like packing up and going home, especially when he beat Spittle in the 83rd minute — but saw his shot strike the crossbar. After that there were few alarms for Wycombe who held out for three useful points and their second double of the season.

WYCOMBE: P. Spittle, P. Birdseye, K. Mead, A. Phillips, R. Davies, P. Cruse, H. Kennedy, M. Holifield, I. Pearson, H. Kettleborough (sub A. Price 58 mins), D. Evans.

SOUTHALL: G. Lynton, H. Manoe, G. Smith, K. Baker, C. Hutchins, C. Rapley, C. Mullan, G. Towers, R. Knowles, D. Harris, A. Clarke. Sub A. Morris (not used).

Referee: G. Gordon (Raynes Park).
Half-time: 1-0. **Goalscorers:** Wycombe — Pearson (36); Evans (73).

Attendance: 1,200.